



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

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Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

**3 August Martin Horlacher “Singularitarianism: a true philosophy or the rap-
ture of the nerds?”**

The technological singularity if upon us - or is it? And is the movement to bring one about a true hope... or just another crazy cult?

**10 August Morandir Armson “Darkness and Light: Zoroastrianism in
World Religions”**

The Zoroastrian religion flourished in the ancient Mid-East and was the religion of the great Persian Empire. There is evidence to show that this faith influenced many other religious traditions, which emerged from the Middle-East. This presentation will examine these influences and seek to to answer the question; what is the religious legacy of ancient Zoroastrianism

17 August Carolyn Donnelly “Beatrix Potter, Author and Illustrator”

Some lesser known facts of her achievements maybe influenced by an Unitarian upbringing.

24 August Rev Geoff Usher “It Only Adds”

We can marvel over the scientific and technological changes which have taken place within our lifetime. And we can be prompted into speculating on what the world will be like in another 50-60 years from now. We can wonder whether artificial intelligence will ever become a reality, or whether the space-docking stations will ever evolve into settled space colonies.

31 August Neil Inall “Food, Food, Glorious Food”.

Most of us will remember these words from Lionel Bart’s wonderful musical “Oliver” sung by hungry boys in a poor house in London. None of us can escape the need to keep our bellies reasonably full. But many people in Australia do not have that luxury every day and for thousands of others around the world hunger is a constant state. With the global population forecast to grow by another 2 billion people by 2050 how well prepared are we to feed all those extra people? Neil will discuss the likely barriers to increased food production and what we ought to be doing about this situation.

Opinions expressed in "Esprit" are not necessarily those of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Extract from “Pope Francis's Radical Environmentalism”

Exploiting the earth “is our sin,” the pontiff says.

By Tara Isabella Burton
The Atlantic Jul 11 2014

This past weekend, Pope Francis did something that was quietly revolutionary. In a talk at the Italian university of Molise, Francis characterized concerns about the environment as “one of the greatest challenges of our time”—a challenge that is theological, as well as political, in nature. “When I look at ... so many forests, all cut, that have become land ... that can [no] longer give life,” he reflected, citing South American forests in particular. “This is our sin, exploiting the Earth. ... This is one of the greatest challenges of our time: to convert ourselves to a type of development that knows how to respect creation.” And the pontiff isn’t stopping there; he’s reportedly planning to issue an encyclical, or papal letter, about man’s relationship with the environment.

It’s easy to be glib about Francis’s remarks—few people see the chopping-down of the Amazonian rainforests as an encouraging development. And a pope championing environmental protection isn’t entirely new; after all, The Guardian dubbed Benedict XVI the “first green pontiff” for his work in this area. **But by characterizing the destruction of the environment not merely as a sin, but rather as our sin—the major sin, he suggests, of modern times—the pope is doing more than condemning public inaction on environmental issues.** By staking out a fiercely pro-environmentalist position, while limiting his discourse about hot-button issues like homosexuality, Francis is using his pulpit to actively shape public discourse about the nature of creation (indeed, environmental issues were part of his first papal mass). In so doing, he is implicitly endorsing a strikingly positive vision of the individual’s relationship with the created world, and with it a profoundly optimistic vision of what it means to be human—and incarnate—overall, opening the door for a radical shift in emphasis, though not doctrine, when it comes to the Catholic Church’s view of mankind.

The Christian view of the individual’s relationship to nature—“creation,” we might call it in a theological context—has traditionally revolved around interpretations of the exhortation in Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Many have cited the idea of dominion to justify an anthropocentric view of the world, in which nature exists solely to provide man with its bounty—a position that is often more prevalent in evangelical Protestant circles, especially within the United States. Legislation such as the Louisiana Science Education Act, which seeks to enact a “balanced” (read: climate-change-denying) curriculum on environmental change in schools, has received support from organizations like the creationist think tank the Discovery Institute and the Christian advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom. The Cornwall Alliance, whose declaration has been signed by luminaries of the religious right, released a 12-part video series in 2010 entitled “Resisting the Green Dragon,” about the dangers of environmentalism. This perspective, however, is hardly limited to Protestants. Consider the Catholic politician Rick Santorum, who at a 2012 energy summit in Colorado rejected the threat of climate change. “We were put on this Earth as creatures of God to have dominion over the Earth, to use it wisely and steward it wisely, but for our benefit not for the Earth’s benefit,” he said.

Such hostile stances on environmentalism are themselves rooted in a far more profound question: To what extent should the self be understood as existing against, or in concordance with, nature? In many Christian traditions, and particularly among the Christian right, the individual and the created world are considered at odds—a product of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and God’s declaration in Genesis 3:16 that “Cursed is the ground because of you [Adam]; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” The act of original sin, in other words, sets up an inherently combative relationship between man

and nature; any conflict is part of “God’s plan.” As G. Elijah Dann, a professor of religion and philosophy at Simon Fraser University in Canada, put it in a Huffington Post article on the evangelical mindset: “To somehow think we can correct climatic instabilities is [seen as] a denial of God’s judgment against human disobedience.” Furthermore, any attempt to ‘fix’ the natural world is an unwelcome effort to shift emphasis from the soul to the body. As Dann writes, “When scientists back in the ’70s were starting to worry about the environment, they were seen as engaging in a secular form of salvation—to save the planet—and, as such, were an affront to God. Emphasis should rather be on the salvation of souls.” The secular and the sacred are, in this worldview, totally separate: to focus on saving the physical world is to harm the immortal soul.

Still, this view—though it is often expressed vocally in American political and theological discourse—is far from the only one. **Another strand of Christian thought interprets the same reference to “dominion” in Genesis as an exhortation to “stewardship.”** The command represents a responsibility as much as a privilege. This perspective has produced quiet movements of “green Christianity” in recent decades, from the proliferation of the idea of “creation care” among evangelicals, to the Environment Justice Program formed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1993, to Pope Francis’s comments in his inaugural mass to “let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment. Read more;

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/pope-franciss-radical-rethinking-of-environmentalism/374300/>

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Not that we’re boasting, but the 7th of our SOL Unitarian Fellowship’s Principles:

“Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part,”

goes back to 1985 when the Principles were adopted by the UUA

Letter Writing

To “The Sydney Morning Herald” 30 June (not published)

The myriad of letters to the SMH regarding religious education and chaplains in public schools have been fascinating, but many totally miss the real issue. The problem is not whether religious education is child abuse or whether we all need to be “saved”. The issue is that why does “the state” think it has the responsibility or right to provide any religious education at all? If reason were to prevail, if we are to have complete freedom of religion, then the state should not be involved in any religious education whatsoever, either in money (for chaplains) or in time and facilities for religious education. If parents wish their children to be educated in any particular religion, then it is the parents’ freedom and responsibility to arrange for that education outside of school hours. Places of worship would then have to provide religious education classes without state subsidy outside school hours. This would free up our public schools to provide sound, research based ethics education for all students, and trained counsellors and social workers to provide the support our troubled students may require. This is the only rational way to solve this apparent problem, but whether the Abbot government is capable of such rationality is another issue.

Ginna Hastings

28 October 2011

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A

Dear Prime Minister,

In February 2010 we launched the Robin Hood Tax campaign, calling for a tiny tax on financial transactions to tackle poverty at home and overseas, provide vaccines and life saving treatment for the world’s most vulnerable, and tackle the impacts of climate change. Eighteen months later we are just days away from a G20 summit where a financial transactions tax (FTT) will be debated.

We have the support of over 115 organisations in the UK, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, 1000 international economists, hundreds of parliamentarians, campaigners in over 50 countries, world leaders such as Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, and global figures such as Bill Gates.

But we don't yet have the support of the UK Government.

We are calling on you to change this now, and work with other G20 countries to introduce a Financial Transactions Tax when you attend the G20 summit in Cannes. Your government has said that you are not opposed to an international financial transactions tax and that you will engage on this issue. But we fear that instead the UK Government is acting to block debate. This is despite the fact that the UK has one of the largest transaction taxes in the world, the stamp duty on shares, and is a world leader in showing how to design and implement such taxes without global agreement.

The UK is also leading the world with its commitment to reach 0.7% of GNI as ODA* and is in a position of strength to champion development and climate finance. We therefore also call on you to argue that the revenues from an FTT are used in part to support international development efforts, and to provide the minimum \$100bn pledged for climate finance.

A Robin Hood Tax would be the most popular tax in history. While you are at Cannes, please act for those hit hardest by the financial crisis. Act to protect essential public services in the UK, to tackle poverty at home and overseas, and to address climate change.

Derek McAuley, on behalf of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. (Along with signatories from other organisations)

*Official Development Assistance

Comment: Patience is needed in fighting this sort of campaign. The G20 countries did not adopt the tax at Cannes. It was not until May

2014 that "The Guardian" was able to say: "The European Union moved closer to a tax on financial transactions after 10 member states agreed to implement the levy by 1 January 2014."

The UK continues to resist it, since it has a large financial services sector it fears will be damaged. See the comments section here:

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/06/george-osborne-eu-financial-transaction-tax-legal-challenge>

It would be better if the tax could be implemented globally all at the same time, then no country would be unduly exposed. However, if it comes to balancing pros & cons, I think the ayes should have it.

Speaking of taxes, we in Australia have now lost our Carbon "Tax" (actually a Carbon Price) before it could morph into an ETS *- so if you're short of a letter writing topic, you may wish to let Bill Shorten know that you support his pledge to introduce an ETS if Labor wins in 2016 and that we'll keep him to it.

Jan Tendys

**Emissions trading or cap and trade is a market-based approach used to control pollution by providing economic incentives for achieving reductions in the emissions of pollutants.[*

A central authority (usually a governmental body) sets a limit or cap on the amount of a pollutant that may be emitted. The limit or cap is allocated or sold to firms in the form of emissions permits which represent the right to emit or discharge a specific volume of the specified pollutant. Firms are required to hold a number of permits (or allowances or carbon credits) equivalent to their emissions. The total number of permits cannot exceed the cap, limiting total emissions to that level. Firms that need to increase their volume of emissions must buy permits from those who require fewer permits.

The transfer of permits is referred to as a trade. In effect, the buyer is paying a charge for polluting, while the seller is being rewarded for having reduced emissions.

Wikipedia

Class in Australia

The following is an extract from an article written by novelist Tim Winton for the magazine 'The Monthly' (January 2014). He described how his use of the word "class" apparently affronted an interviewer, leaving Winton himself somewhat nonplussed. He wrote:

"In October, John Martin, the OECD's former director for employment, labour and social affairs, cited figures that estimated 22% of growth in Australia's household income between 1980 and 2008 went to the richest 1% of the population. The nation's new prosperity was unevenly spread in those years. To borrow the former Morgan Stanley global equity analyst Gerard Minack's phrasing about the situation in the United States, "the rising tide did not lift all boats; it floated a few yachts". And yet there is a curious reluctance to examine the systemic causes of this inequity. The political economist Frank Stilwell has puzzled over what he calls contemporary "beliefs" around social inequality. Australians' views range, he says, from outright denial of any disparity to Darwinian acceptance. Many now believe "people get what they deserve", and to my mind such a response is startling and alien. Structural factors have become too awkward to discuss.

As the nation's former treasurer Wayne Swan learnt in 2012 when he published an essay in this magazine about the disproportionate influence of the nation's super-rich, anybody reckless enough to declare class a live issue is likely to be met with howls of derision. According to the new mores, any mention of structural social inequality is tantamount to a declaration of class warfare. Concerns about the distribution of wealth, education and health are difficult to raise in a public forum without needing to beat off the ghost of Stalin. The only form of political correctness that the right will tolerate is the careful elision of class from public discourse, and this troubling discretion has become mainstream. It constitutes an ideological triumph for conservatives that even they must marvel at. Having uttered the c-word in polite company, I felt, for a moment, as if I'd shat in the municipal pool.

The nation of my childhood was not classless. The social distinctions were palpable and the subject of constant discussion

Australia's long tradition of egalitarianism was something people my age learnt about at school. I recall teachers, dowdy folk of indeterminate politics, who spoke of "the fair go" with a reverence they usually only applied to Don Bradman or the myth of Anzac. Australia's fairness was a source of pride, an article of faith. The nation of my childhood was not classless, however. The social distinctions were palpable and the subject of constant discussion. Where I came from – the raw state-housing suburbs of Perth in the early '60s – there were definite boundaries and behaviours, many imposed and some internalised. The people I knew identified as working class. Proud and resentful, we were alert to difference, amazed whenever we came upon it. Difference was both provocative and exotic, and one generally cancelled out the negative power of the other. We expressed the casual racism of our time. We played sport with blackfellas but didn't really socialise. We laughed at the ten-pound Poms with their Coronation Street accents but felt slightly cowed by their stories of great cities and imperial grandeur. The street was full of migrants who'd fled war-ravaged Eastern Europe. Like most of the locals, they worked in factories and on road gangs. They told us kids we were free, and we thought they were telling us something we already knew. As a boy, I believed that Jack was as good as his master. But I understood that Jacks like me always had masters".

After describing how the Whitlam years allowed more working class boys like himself - and even girls - to escape social restrictions and how that had changed again with the development of neoliberalism and globalisation, Winton went on to write:

"As the Sydney Morning Herald's economics editor Ross Gittins wrote in the lead-up to the September poll, 'If you think the class war is over, you're not paying enough attention.' He said: 'The reason the well-off come down so hard on those who use class rhetoric is that they don't want anyone drawing attention to

how the war is going.' To suggest that ours is a classless society or that matters of class are resolved because of national prosperity and the ideological victory of the right is either tinned or dishonest. At least the Americans are brutally frank about it. Gittins went on to quote the billionaire investor Warren Buffett, who declared: 'There's class warfare alright, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.'

Australia may be dazzlingly prosperous, and keen to project a classless image to itself and others, but it is still socially stratified, even if there are fewer obvious indicators of class distinction than there were 40 years ago. Accent surely isn't one of them. Postcode can be telling but not conclusive. Even job description can be unreliable. In an era of tax credit regimes, what people wear or drive is misleading, as is the size of the homes they live in. The world of surfaces has never been trickier to read. People have begun to live more ostentatiously, projecting social aspirations that owe more to the entertainment industry than political ideology. The soundest measure of a person's social status is mobility. And the chief source of mobility is money. Whether you're born to it or accumulate it, wealth determines a citizen's choices of education, housing, health care and employment. It will be an indicator of health, of longevity. Money still talks loudest. Even if it often speaks from the corner of its mouth. Even if it covers its mouth entirely. And governments no longer have a taste for the redistribution of wealth. Nor are they keen on intervening to open enclaves and break down barriers to social mobility. Apparently these tasks are the responsibility of the individual.

Where once Australia looked like a pyramid in terms of its social strata, with the working class as its broad base and ballast and the rich at the top, it's come to resemble something of a misshapen diamond – wide in the middle – and that's no bad thing in and of itself. I say that, of course, as a member of the emblematically widening middle. The problem is those Australians the middle has left behind without a glance."

Helen Whatmough used the article: "The C Word, some thoughts about class in Australia" in her talk on class earlier this year.

Read the full article here:

<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2013/december/1385816400/tim-winton/c-word>

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**Comment:**

Diamond may be the right shape for Australian class consciousness - we almost all identify as middle class now - but when it comes to money the shape is more pyramidal with a spike up the top. **See what you make of this contribution to "The Conversation"**.

<http://www.kingstribune.com/index.php/weekly-email/item/2042-the-slow-death-of-the-australian-middle-class>

**Jan Tendys**

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What are you doing for Peace?

Working together for peace...

UN International Day of Peace, which takes place every year on 21 September, comes and goes without much public awareness worldwide. Yet peace is the most elusive quality that humanity craves amidst wars, terrorism, violence, domestic violence and discord which occur on a daily basis. The Centenary of World War I commences in 2014 – to commemorate its beginning on 28 July 1914 and lasting until 11 November 1918. The world needs to honour this centenary, but more importantly recognise its impact on human civilisation in its quest for the ultimate goal – peace. As members of the global community who share a common humanity, we should unite in a concerted effort towards building peace initiatives and working together to achieve peace throughout the world. The United Nations Association of Australia NSW Division encourages everyone, no matter where they are, to take time to observe UN International Day of Peace and, more importantly, work together for peace everyday of our lives.

What is the UN International Day of Peace?

'Peace is one of humanity's most precious needs. It is also the United Nations' highest calling.' UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

The UN International Day of Peace, sometimes unofficially known as World Peace Day or Peace Day, is observed annually on 21 September. It is dedicated to world peace, and specifically the absence of war and violence – this day is observed with a temporary ceasefire in a combat zone to enable humanitarian aid access. It was established by a United Nations resolution in 1981 to coincide with the opening of the General Assembly's yearly session. The UN International Day of Peace was first celebrated in 1982, and is honoured by many nations and peoples. In 2013, for the first time, Peace Day was dedicated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to peace education, the key preventive means to reduce war sustainably.

To inaugurate the day, the United Nations Peace Bell is rung at the UN Headquarters in New York City. The bell is cast from coins donated by children from all continents except Africa, and was a gift from the United Nations Association of Japan, as 'a reminder of the human cost of war'. The Peace Bell is inscribed with the powerful statement: 'Long live absolute world peace'.

ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

The United Nations Association of Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to informing the community about the work of the United Nations and seeking to advance its goals in Australia and around the world. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated in his UN Day Message 2013: '...let us pledge to live up to our founding ideals and work together for peace, development and human rights.'

To coincide with the Centenary of WWI (2014-2018) the UNAA NSW Division has taken the initiative to promote the significance of these ideals and the UN's role as Peacekeeper by a commemoration launch of the UN International Day of Peace on 21 September through to UN Day on 24 October 2014.

To strengthen its focus on peace, the UNAA NSW Division has established the UN International Day of Peace Committee which has

adopted the unifying symbols of peace: the olive, bell, candle and the white dove as its main themes.

Contributed by the Rev. Geoff Usher

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## Readings Selected by Ginna Hastings

### ***Introductory Reading:***

Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals have always emphasized the positive aspects of the divine and human nature. As a result, critics sometimes charge that liberals don't truly understand the reality of evil. Yet liberals are not naïve about evil; they just have a different framework for understanding it.

For religious liberals, evil is not a supernatural force locked in a cosmic struggle against the forces of good. Liberals also do not worry much about the traditional "theodicy" problem – how evil can exist if God is both all loving and all-powerful. For liberals, evil is neither a demonic spirit nor a philosophical dilemma, but a reality to respond to and confront.

(As these essays show), Unitarian Universalists are fully aware of the profound evil we face today, including unnecessary human suffering, rampant environmental degradation and destructive systematic structures such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence. Yet none of these are inevitable. Religious liberals live with hope grounded in the belief that the world can be nudged towards the good. Our choices matter: We can either enable (or ignore) the evil around us, or we can help overcome it. ***(Paul Razor)***

### ***Reading before Meditation***

Sometimes I use a very subjective, almost subconscious barometer when reading the news of the day and deciding whether some action bears the weight of the word evil. It's not the magnitude of an event, nor the cold-heartedness of those involved, nor even the historical impact. It's the degree of heart-



break that I feel: beyond sorrow or horror, a sense that something has been blasted apart, a shattering of hope, the collapse of what I thought or wished were true about the world and human nature. There are some truths, some news, that break the heart – not permanently, but utterly, for a while, as the realization forms perhaps for the thousandth time: this, too, is part of our humanity. Evil is the capacity, within us and among us, to break sacred bonds with our own souls, with one another, and with the holy. Further, it is the willingness to excuse or justify this damage, to deny it or to call it virtue. The soil in which it flourishes is a rich compost of ignorance, arrogance, fear and delusion - mostly self-delusion - all mingled with the sparkling dust of our original, human being.

**(Victoria Safford, minister of white Bear U U Church)**

*GINNA'S final reading for the service on 29 June 2014 will be given in another Esprit.*

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Celebrating Candace's visit. (photo by Carolyn Donnelly)



Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter. Full membership \$50 concession \$20 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website www.sydneyunitarians.org . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings for an application form at the Sunday service.

If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: jtendys@bigpond.com or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical nature that you would like to share with the congregation? As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

Fellowship contact 0466 940 461